

# Phoenix's Rodeo Drive-In was one wild hay

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Special to Arizona Republic  
USA TODAY NETWORK

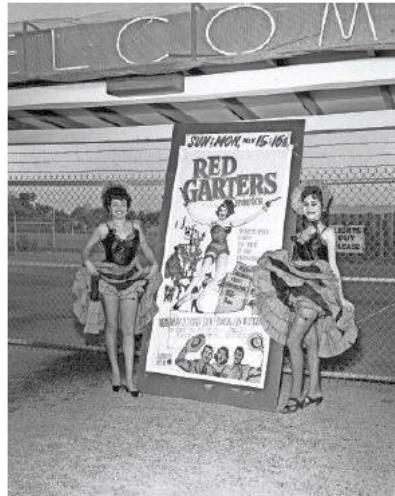
The Rodeo Drive-In opened in 1953 in an industrial area of Phoenix near 12th Street and Buckeye Road, which was then called Henshaw Road. The theater owners paved the entire site with asphalt for comfort — and to dissuade excavations on land that was once the Jacob Waltz ranch.

"Every inch of that property had been dug up by treasure hunters, hoping to find the fabled gold of the Lost Dutchman mine reported buried on his ranch," J. B. McCormick, the theater's co-owner, told *The Arizona Republic*.

The Rodeo was the Valley's seventh drive-in at the time. The 10.5-acre site had room for 550 cars, a 64-foot screen and a snack bar.

"Popcorn is the sweetheart of theater owners," added McCormick. "We'd all go back to cow pastures without it. As long as we charge only \$1 per car for admission with as many as eight persons per car and show three features on weekends, it's the popcorn that keeps us in business."

Opening night featured the movies



The Rodeo Drive-In in Phoenix featured the movie "Red Garters" in 1955. COURTESY OF DOUGLAS C. TOWNE

"Branded," "Flying Leathernecks" and "The Sniper," all just "24 Short Blocks from the Heart of Phoenix." The drive-in, which boasted "Always Two Cartoons," was built by John C. Kelton & Son Contractors, had signage by Myers

Leiber Co. and was enclosed by American Fence Co. Patrons could walk in for 40 cents, children for just 10 cents.

The Rodeo expanded its entertainment offerings the following year by hosting a circus with elephants and acrobats under the big top for three days.

That same year, moviegoers were treated to a wedding performed in front of the snack bar between films, uniting two employees who met at the theater. The bride was a snack bar cashier whose family lived nearby and the groom was a part-time usher from Luke Air Force Base.

*Republic* columnist Don Dedera interviewed Rodeo co-owner Wade E. Allen for insights into the theater business in 1957. Allen complained about the hundreds of stolen speakers along with "thrill-happy" patrons who occasionally climbed the ladder behind the back wall to dangle their legs over the top of the screen. Allen also commented on the strange items people lost at the drive-in: "I have had six sets of false teeth in my lost-and-found department at one time."

Allen noted that as an act of good will, he had run speakers to two houses situated behind the drive-in so that the

residents could have the movie.

"If this business I'd have been out of cluded.

The drive-in had dents over the years was changing the the a bullet hit the letter The drive-in was ro over the next two de theater patron died 1978, according to T

The film "Shang because of a fire at t A customer became two police officers w disturbance.

"She really took those officers," a lie

The officers need Luke's Hospital, wh said that "human b infectious than dog flict occurred over a

The drive-in clos tral City Campus of ty College now occu

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